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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 000074

SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: AMB URGES SUNNI POLITICAL LEADERS TO DENOUNCE
VIOLENCE, HELP END THE INSURGENCY

Classified By: Ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad for reasons 1.4 (B) and (D).

1. (C) SUMMARY: Ambassador Khalilzad met on January 5 with key leaders from the Iraqi Islamic Party (IIP) and on January 6 with the Iraqi National Dialogue Council (INDC) to review their concerns about the December 15 parliamentary elections and to solicit their views on the formation of a national unity government. He also expressed deep concern about the increase in violence and asked that the leaders issue statements calling for calm. The leaders all expounded unrealistic expectations that the ongoing international review of the elections would result in specific changes to the outcome. However, none of them threatened to boycott the new parliament or negotiations over a unity government if the election results remain unchanged. Instead, they said they are talking to the Kurds about the shape of that government. They are developing lists of potential candidates and are engaged in discussions about potential power-sharing arrangements in a national unity government. The leaders were far less forthcoming regarding statements condemning the recent upsurge in violence, claiming that the violence was a response to GOI repression and killings of their political operatives after the election as well as to provocative statements by some Shia leaders linking all Sunni Arabs with the insurgency. The Ambassador told the Sunni leaders that they are not credible political partners if they defend the insurgency, which, with the formation of a widely representative government, could no longer be justified and would have to be termed terrorism. END SUMMARY.

Key Issues - Election, Government Formation, Violence

2. (SBU) Ambassador Khalilzad met on January 5 with Tariq Hashimi and Ayad Samarra, key leaders in the Iraqi Islamic Party (IIP). On January 6, he met with the Iraqi National Dialogue Council (INDC) chairman Sheykh Khalif Al-Ayan, accompanied by Mahmood Mashadani and Abd Nasir Al-Janabi. The IIP and the INDC are two of the three parties in the Al-Tawaffuq Front, the Sunni Arab coalition that, according to preliminary results, won 43 seats in the December 15 elections.

3. (C) The Ambassador told the leaders that the International Mission for Iraqi Elections (IMIE) is conducting a review of election complaints and IECI audits and will issue its preliminary findings before January 18. The US will support the recommendations in the report, but it is unreasonable to expect that the election will be rerun, the Ambassador told the Sunni Arab leaders.

4. (C) The USG is encouraging a national unity government, said Ambassador Khalilzad. He noted that the Kurd, Sunni, and secular parties together have more votes than the Shia Alliance and that, if they joined together, they could negotiate with the Shia on an equal footing to form the new government. The USG has no specific names to propose for any positions but proposed ministers should be competent and the key security agencies (Defense, Interior and Intelligence) led by people who are non-sectarian, with no ties to militias, and who enjoy broad political support. Otherwise, the USG would have difficulty in cooperating with the ministries.

5. (C) The Ambassador expressed deep concern about the upsurge in violence and asked the leaders to issue statements for an immediate suspension of violence during the government formation process. He noted that statements by some groups unhappy with the provisional election results suggested support for the insurgency. This is a mistake that makes the formation of a unity government more difficult, he noted. Parties cannot have one foot in the insurgency and another in the government. He also cautioned that political parties should not defend as legitimate violence against a government that is the outgrowth of a representative process; such violence must be condemned as terrorism.

Unrealistic Expectations for Electoral Review

6. (C) IIP leader Tariq Hashimi asserted that the Sunni Arab complaints about the election are very important and that their supporters expect concrete remedies; otherwise there will be "trouble". The Tawaffuq Front is being condemned as being too soft by some parties, especially former INDC

spokesman Saleh Mutleg (whose competing Sunni Arab Iraqi Unified Front slate won 11 seats). Tawaffuq hard-liner Abd Nasir Al-Janabi was more direct, demanding that his bloc be awarded 12 extra seats to compensate for alleged unfair seat allocation in the new Council of Representatives (CR). He claimed that Sunni Arabs represent 35-40% of Iraq's population, the same as the Shia Arabs. The Ambassador replied that there is nothing the USG could do about the 12 seats -- any revision in seat allocation will be decided by the next CR (perhaps aided by the census planned for 2007). The allocation of the 45 compensatory seats is distributed according to the electoral law and cannot be simply awarded.

Sunnis Developing Candidate Lists

17. (C) Both Hashimi and another Tawaffuq Front leader, Khalif Al-Ayan, confirmed that the Tawaffuq is developing a list of candidates for senior government positions and will provide Embassy with the list when internal consensus is reached. Hashimi stated that the Sunni Arabs need to see fundamental changes in the makeup of the government - they will balk at the same names in top positions. He argued that a Sunni Arab in a top symbolic position, like the President, would be an important sign that things have changed. PolCouns urged the Sunni Arab leaders to weigh carefully their options. They need to consider whether it is more useful to gain the Presidency when, under the new constitution, a Deputy President has nearly as much authority and the Sunni Arabs might secure more ministerial jobs by accepting a Deputy President position. Hashimi and al-Janabi understood the logic but appeared unconvinced.

Increase in Violence

18. (C) Both groups of party leaders were markedly cool to the Ambassador's call for public statements to end the violence. Hashimi was especially harsh in rejecting the call to condemn the recent kidnapping of MOI Jabr's sister saying, "We have no sympathy for Jabr and view him bitterly." Expressing sympathy for the victim, he noted that the kidnapping occurred near the IIP office and that IIP bodyguards shot at the kidnappers in an unsuccessful attempt to intervene. Hashimi said that violence is a two-sided problem and that the recent upsurge in insurgent activity is a response to government violence against Sunni Arabs after the election. Tawaffuq Front official Mahmoud Mashadani asserted the violence was in response to the SCIRI leader Hakim's and Da'wa leader Jawad Al-Maliki's recent harsh statements linking all Sunnis with the insurgency. Ayan claimed that the GOI is assassinating Sunni Arab election observers and confiscating homes and fields in Anbar, with families being "thrown into the wilderness". He asserted that 58 Tawaffuq observers were detained by the IP the day after the election and that 38 of them were killed. He claimed that the GOI, along with Iran, supports Zarqawi, whose terrorism primarily affects Sunni Arabs. Mashadani charged that the GOI is increasing terrorism against Arab Sunnis and the USG is not intervening.

19. (C) Ambassador pushed back, stating that Zarqawi wants to provoke a civil war and that the USG will not cease operations against him. Shia leaders publicly complain that the USG is restraining the GOI from responding to terror and that that is the reason there is an increase in violence. The Ambassador emphasized that the Sunni Arab political parties must come out firmly against violence or their credibility as a government partner will suffer. In response, Mashadani said that the political leaders can reach the "resistance" and the Ba'athists to affect their behavior. Al-Janabi asked that the USG be patient with the Sunni Arab political groups.

Comment

110. (C) COMMENT: Hashimi underlined the importance of the international monitoring group looking seriously into fraud allegations and making changes to the results as necessary. That said, in neither meeting with these Tawaffuq Front leaders did anyone mention boycotting the new parliament or abstaining from negotiations about a unity government. Internally they must decide what they want - symbolic leadership in a Presidency or real power through control of key ministries. They are clearly focused on problems relating to the security ministries as a matter of immediate concern. The key for the next weeks will be to convince them that, without a definitive public break from the insurgency, their ability to convince the Kurds and Shia to accept them as serious partners in government will be limited, even with our support. END COMMENT.

KHALILZAD